

Child and Family Services Update

November 8, 2002

Brave Little Souls

By Richard J. Anderson, Director

This month is National Adoption Month. In 1990, we as a nation established November as a month to focus on the children in foster care who are waiting for permanent homes. Nationally, there are approximately 588,000 children and youth in foster care. 134,000 are waiting for permanent homes. These children are not going back to their families of origin. They are waiting!

Now enter the courageous and loving adoptive families. Over half of the adoptive families are those that opened their homes to care for these brave little souls when they had to leave their original homes due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. And some of these children have very special needs. In between our accepting a call for help and the launching of a newly-formed, permanent, safe family is this committed group of people who provide empathy, services, legal assistance, and homes for these brave little souls.

We salute the children for their bravery and for the hope they bring to all of us in our own lives. We thank the caregivers, both foster and adoptive, who provide those most important services of love, home, and safety. We thank all the professional and volunteer helpers that assist these brave little souls in having a safe and beneficial journey to adulthood. We are appreciative of our partnerships with the Adoption Exchange, the Foster/Adoptive Family Association, and the Foster Care Foundation in working together to find and support the families. We could not do our part if it were not for the honest interest and hard work of volunteer and professional services from the Office of the Attorney General, Office of the Guardian Ad Litem, our great judges, Foster Care Citizen Review, and many other partners in Mental Health, Services for People with Disabilities, and the list goes on, and I would be amiss, somehow, having left out someone. Forgive me. I had to list some of those that first came to mind.

Each of you, as Child and Family Services staff, are engaged continually in the issues of safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families. The securing of a permanent home for each child and the providing of services to assist each child in that home is one of the great successes of our work. Thanks for doing such effective work for the children and the families.

Utah has a good record in the national comparisons for moving children from foster care to permanent families. In Utah, during the last fiscal year, 323 children were adopted from foster care. The average length of stay, from the time they were removed to the time their adoption was final, was 18.5 months. Some may not understand that this is a very short time compared to the national average of 38.8 months (2000). These months show the time given to the family of origin to make their changes; legal processes to move for termination of parental rights, locating and approving adoptive homes, and placement supervision up until the legal time limits have been met. We

continue to find ways to decrease the months of waiting. This is to the credit of each of you and to our partners. Thanks to you all.

Mentor Parent Partner Program

By Karen Sitterud, Utah Foster/Adoptive Family Association

The Utah Foster/Adoptive Family Association has implemented a new program in the Eastern Region and has introduced it to the Southwest Region for help in the retention of quality foster homes. It is called the Mentor Parent Partner Program. This program was developed with the vision in mind that as resource families we are sometimes the best recruiters and also can be the best support system to retain resource homes. The program has four definite goals:

1. To retain good foster homes and therefore prevent disruptions for foster/adoptive/kinship children.
2. To support resource parents with additional hands-on knowledge from another Peer Foster Parent.
3. To encourage and support resource parents to become familiar with other families in their area, thereby forming support groups.
4. To encourage and support resource families to become comfortable working within the system they have chosen to serve.

Mentors will meet when possible with resource families in team meetings, go to court, even set up meetings with social workers and supervisors on behalf of the parent partner they are working with. We would like to introduce this program throughout the state.

To get started in each area we ask that a core team of a Resource Family Consultant, Office of Licensing personnel, Utah Foster Care Foundation trainer, and the Utah Foster/Adoptive Family Association come together and chose 10 to 20 families they feel are great examples in working within the system and keeping up with their licenses and training. We will then send letters to those families inviting them to participate. A two-hour training will take place before the mentors are assigned to a specific family. Each family will be paired up with a family doing the same type of service. For example, a new structured family would have a structured family as a mentor.

We feel that as this program is utilized, many of the issues that workers deal with in supporting resource families will resolve themselves and therefore free up more time for the workers to do their jobs in working with children and families.

If you have questions on this program please feel free to call Karen Sitterud, Program Manager, Utah Foster/Adoptive Family Association at 1-866-614-5416 or e-mail: karen.sitterud@m.sesc.k12.ut.us.

Update On The Fostering Healthy Children Program

By Chris Chytraus, Program Manager, Fostering Healthy Children Program

I recently met with Richard and the Region Directors to discuss changes we will be making in our Fostering Healthy Children Program (FHCP). I would like to take this opportunity to share with you these changes. If you have questions, please feel free to contact your regional FHC Manager or me.

As many of you know, Child and Family Services contracts with the Department of Health (DOH) to administer the Fostering Healthy Children Program. Through a DOH agreement, Child and Family Services provides 25% in-state match and with this funding FHCP draws an additional 75% federal Medicaid match, under an Administrative Case Management option. The Medicaid reimbursement through this option pays for administrative case management by “licensed medical personnel” only. For this reason, we are transitioning the caseloads previously held by the HPRs to the RNs. The HPRs will assume a role similar to the Child and Family Services secondary caseworker. The HPRs have been assigned sections across the state for which they will be responsible, so you may see some new names in SAFE documentation.

With the HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) Regulations just around the corner, we have made some other decisions to make compliance easier and decrease unnecessary copying of medical records. These changes will also make the audit process easier since everything will be in the same place. These changes include:

- Once the RN enters a Health Visit Report, the RN will sign that it is entered/reviewed and give it to the caseworker to be filed in the green binder. FHCP staff will no longer keep copies in a separate file. If RNs or HPRs need to refer to a child's record, we will go to the green binder or look in SAFE. If the foster parents' copy is attached we will mail it back to them. We will not make extra copies and send out.
- The RN will keep a three-ring binder with a health-tracking sheet on each child (and possibly a copy of the psychological assessment) in their caseload. Hard copies of all other health care records will be kept with Child and Family Services.
- When the HPRs send the exam due or overdue letter to the placement they will email the caseworker and RN that they have done it. An extra copy of the letter will NOT be printed to go to the caseworker.
- Contacts that the HPRs have with the foster parents will be entered into SAFE.
- Medical records that are received on children in custody will be entered, as appropriate, in SAFE and then given to the caseworker to be kept in the green binder.
- We will be training all FHC staff on data entry to make the entries standard across the state. This will provide accurate complete information in SAFE to which everyone can easily refer.

We look forward to continuing our collaborative relationship with all of you. Please let us know if you have suggestions for our program to continue to enhance the services you provide.

From The Realm Of The Bean Counters...

By Charles Bentley

Once upon a time in an isolated corner of the Administration building, there lived a group of four Child and Family Services accountants. They were really good at crunching numbers, creating reports, filing documents, creating budgets, and lots of other exciting stuff. Over time the accounting clan realized that numbers prowess does not a genius make. At times they were **almost** as clueless as the Regions sometimes alleged.

Then came budget season and the pressure was on. How could the Bean Counters ever answer all of the questions the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget was asking? Fear, stress, and despair ran rampant through accounting land. Then the Bean Counters got a radical idea. What would happen if they asked non-accountants to help on the project? Soon people throughout the State Office and Regions were working to gather and refine data for the FY 2004 budget request. The stress level dropped and the request was finished before the deadline and without error. Never had a budget request been prepared so well and so easily. "Could it be that working together cooperatively produces positive results?" they theorized.

To test their theory they planned a meeting at a Region Office and asked the Region to spend half of the day teaching what Child and Family Services employees do. Each Bean Counter was assigned a caseworker to shadow for the morning. Who would have guessed the outcome? In a few hours the Bean Counters learned more about Child and Family Services than they had during the rest of their service with Child and Family Services. They started to have an understanding of what those numbers really mean. Their theory was indeed true. By working together to achieve the common goal, quality and satisfaction were improved. Even more interesting, it didn't even hurt!

Although it sounds like a fairy tale, it is all true. Thanks to all those who made the FY 2004 budget submission a huge success. This time Child and Family Services set the standard for the rest of the Department. It was enjoyable to watch the rest try to match our combined efforts. The Bean Counters also wish to thank the following Northern Region staff for the wonderful learning experience they provided on short notice:

Rhett Fronk, Supervisor
Jennifer Larson, CPS Worker
Charlene Sansone, CPS Worker
Heath Selin, Family Preservation Worker
Mindy Sneddon, Foster Care Worker

As the accounting staff talked on they way back to the Admin. Building, there were some common themes that emerged. We are impressed with the professionalism of the staff. They are dedicated in spite of the long hours and modest pay. The results of their efforts are not always immediate, yet they persevere. We are struck by their willingness to face dangerous situations to protect children.

Thanks to all who fulfill the mission of Child and Family Services. We now better understand your efforts and applaud you for them.

Annual Report

By Brad McGarry, Office of Services Review

The Office of Services Review (OSR) released its annual report on the system review of Child and Family Services as provided for in UCA §62A-4a-118. Listed below are some of the highlights of that report. If you are interested in reviewing the entire report, it can be found on the web at www.hsosr.utah.gov. Click on the "Reports" tab and download the 2002 OSR annual report.

Case File Review

Child Protective Services

- Upon the completion of the CPS investigation, services were initiated for the family 86% of the time, which is a 10-percentage point increase from FY2001.
- This year's review showed that investigators continued to make better efforts to locate kinship placements when children needed to be removed from their home.
- Children were visited in shelter care within 48 hours of removal from home approximately 26% of the time. While this score is still significantly low, it is a four-percentage point increase compared to the score from last year's review.
- The investigators interviewed both of the child's parents 69% of the time, which is a 10-percentage point increase.
- As per the FY2002 review, children were not seen on time according to the priority of the review as often as they were last year. Evidence of interviewing the children outside the presence of the alleged perpetrator decreased this year to 92%, which still exceeds the Child and Family Services goal of 90%.
- Four of the items reviewed for unable to locate cases were the same as last year. A new requirement of contacting the referent was added and scored for the first time this year. Three of the original four items scored decreased this year. One of the four remained the same as compared to last year. The referent was contacted 66% of the time.
- All three of the items scored for unaccepted referrals increased this year, and all three scores significantly exceed the goal of 85%.

Home-Based Services

- Monthly visits by the caseworker in the family home increased this year to an average of 82%.
- Caseworkers contacted service providers more often to evaluate the clients' progress.
- Professionals involved with the family were included in the development of the case plan more often (33%); however, this score is still significantly low.

- The involvement of the parents, stepparents, and target children all decreased this year as compared to last year.
- There was a current case plan in the file for 44% of the cases, and the caseworker initiated services for the family 66% of the time.

Foster Care Services

- Caseworkers visited the child in the out-of-home placement approximately 82% of the time. This is a significant increase from the score last year.
- Caseworkers visited the children at least once per month approximately 90% of the time, which exceeds the goal of 85%. However, the second monthly visit does not occur as often, usually between 55% and 72% depending on the month.
- Caseworkers interviewed the providers about the well-being of the child approximately 87% of the time. This exceeds the goal of 85%.
- The initial case plan is completed on time 34% of the time, and 39% of the cases had a complete case plan in the file.
- Involving others in the development of the case plan increased for all parties except for the Guardian ad Litem and the child. Both of those scores decreased. The largest increases included the foster parents, mental health representatives, and educational representatives.
- Services are being initiated for the families 64% of the time, which is almost double the score of last year.
- Child and Family Services provided the opportunity for children to visit with their parents and siblings 68% and 51% of the time, respectively.
- Initial and annual health care exams and mental health evaluations were performed more often this year as compared to last year. Dental exams are being provided on a consistent level of 66%.
- Follow-up medical care and mental health care occurred more often, whereas follow-up care for dental needs decreased slightly this year.

Qualitative Case Review

- A total number of 168 cases were reviewed for the FY2002, 24 cases per region (72 in the Salt Lake Valley Region).
- Statewide, **91.7% of the cases scored in the acceptable range on the Overall Child Status**, compared to 84.7% last year and 78.2% the year before. **Overall, this meets the exit goal of 85% required in the Milestone Plan!**
- **For the first time all regions met the exit criteria on Child Status.** Each region had an overall Child Status score of at least 87.7%, and in Western Region the score even reached 100%!
- Of the 168 cases reviewed, 160 passed on Safety. That's 95.2% of all cases, compared to 87.7% last year. It's a remarkable achievement.
- Most Child Status indicators scored very well. The domains that scored over 85% include Safety, Appropriateness of Placement, Physical Well-Being, Learning Progress, Caregiver Functioning, and Client Satisfaction. The following domains still need some improvement: Stability, Prospects for Permanence, and Emotional

Well-Being. Family Functioning and Resourcefulness progressed steadily and reached 65.8% this year.

- The overall score for **Systems Performance statewide is 57.7%**. This is only minimally higher than last year's result of 57.1%, but still significantly above the result of the year before of 41.4%.
- While the improvement on System Performance statewide is only negligible, individual regions made considerable progress this year. Southwest Region achieved the highest overall score with 79.2% and is getting close to reaching the 85% exit mark. Eastern Region is next with 66.7%. Northern Region and Western Region also made great improvements.
- Progress was noted on Child and Family Planning Process (former Service Plan), Child and Family Team and Coordination, Child and Family Participation, Effective Results, and Tracking and Adaptation. The improvements are a sign that the training and implementation of these practice principles is starting to show in the review. However, Functional Assessment and Long-Term View remain low and actually have slightly decreased since last year.

CHIP Open Enrollment Press Release

By Carol Miller

Utah's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) will be accepting applications beginning November 12 and ending November 22, 2002. For more details, please read the press release that was issued on October 23, 2002 by going to:

<http://health.utah.gov/pio/nr/2002/1023-CHIPFinalOE.pdf>.